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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of the two 1999 issues of a newsletter addressing the administrative concerns of child-care centers, learning centers, preschools, nursery schools, kindergartens, and intergenerational centers. Issue 218 features articles on problems with parents such as late pickups, constant complainers, complaints about other children, and poor parenting skills. This issue also contains articles on developing effective staff teams, economizing while preserving program quality, staff retention, and the "I Am Your Child" campaign. Issue 219 features an interview with public television show creator and host Fred Rogers regarding influences on young children. This issue also contains author interviews related to training staff to build relationships and on hospitalized children, and articles on staff teams and on problems with parents, such as late tuition payments and separation issues. (KB)

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Issue 218
Issue 219

Christine Kalbaugh, Editor

Kalbaugh Communications

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JCCA JOURNAL OF CHILD-CARE ADMINISTRATION
Issue 218
A National Publication Addressing The Concerns Of:
Child-care Centers Learning Centers Preschools Nursery Schools Kindergartens Intergenerational Centers

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Problems With Parents: Join This Ongoing Dialogue

Handling difficult situations with parents will be the subject of an ongoing JCCA series.

As most human relations problems don't have single, definitive solutions that work in all cases, we ask owners and directors to add their voices to this dialogue.

Please share with your colleagues solutions that have worked for you. And if you have specific problems with parents that you'd like JCCA and other owners and directors to address, please bring them to our attention.

Common Concerns

There are problems with parents that virtually every director faces at some time. Among them:

- Late Pickups
- Constant Complainers
- Pressure for Academics
- Complaints About Other Children
- Poor Parenting Skills
- Late Tuition Payments
- Separation Issues

We'll begin the discussion on several of these topics here. Future articles will continue to explore them and others.

Late Pickups

The problem of parents arriving late to pick up their children has several facets.

One is that **morale** is threatened.

Staff who have to stay beyond the scheduled time may be late for other obligations, such as picking up their own children from school or going to second jobs. Often, the lateness is on a Friday, when almost everyone is especially eager to leave.

Even without those special circumstances, however, staff members are entitled to leave at the agreed-upon time, and are likely to feel resentment when they cannot.

Instead of ending the workday tired but happy and fulfilled, they're likely to leave feeling somewhat negative and put-upon.

In a field where adequate compensation is a constant concern, "small" personal considerations are of primary importance.

If children stay past the hours for which the center is licensed, there are also **legal** concerns.

Perhaps above all, there is the issue of **respect**.

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Parents who habitually comes late show disdain for the center and its personnel. All the more so when they don't call ahead, or when they act as if nothing is wrong and don't apologize.

Ways Centers Deal With Late Pickups

Late Fees

Here are steps some directors recommend to make this technique work:

Enforce your fee policy. Many centers don't, because of kindness or concerns about public relations.

However, if you don't take your business seriously, parents won't either. Also, by being "kind" to late parents, you're being *unkind* to your employees by increasing the likelihood that they'll have to stay late again.

A reputation for upholding center policies is itself a strong deterrent to noncompliance.

You may decide to structure your policy to allow one or more "free" latenesses, but stick by the rules you set, and enforce them consistently.

A reputation for upholding center policies is itself a strong deterrent to noncompliance.

Highlight the policy at enrollment. Spell it out in the agreement parents sign and note it prominently in your parent handbook. It's a good idea to state it verbally too, emphasizing that it is strictly enforced.

Make your fee high enough. Often, parents are willing to pay a small amount in exchange for the extra time they gain. If the fee "hurts," they're far less likely to use this trick.

At enrollment, you can explain that the late fee is high because the center wants to discourage late pickups.

How high should it be? That depends on many factors, including of course, the economic level of the area. Some centers charge by the minute; others by five-minute increments or other blocks of time.

JCCA would like to hear from directors what rates they generally charge.

Pay the fee to the staff member who stays late. This small gesture of appreciation and goodwill can go a long way.

Other Measures

Limit the number of times a parent can be late. Establish the number and spell out the policy in your parent handbook and other written material.

State that after that point, parents may be asked to withdraw their children from the center.

Each time a parent is late, send a warning letter.

Tell staff not to circumvent your lateness policy. If parents find out that one teacher is making exceptions to a fee or other restraints, but theirs isn't, or that their teacher has excused others but made them pay, they'll be justifiably angry.

Enforce the policy regardless of pickup time. If your center runs on staggered schedules, require that parents be on time even if their children go home before the center closes.

You may allow them to get pre-approval for exceptions, but if they don't ask in advance, charge late fees and enforce other rules.

This is fair to parents as well as staff, and it reinforces your reputation for professionalism and consistency.

Appeal directly to parents. They may not realize how much inconvenience their lateness is causing. Most people will cooperate if appealed to in a reasonable and courteous way.

Send letters home clearly stating the policy and the reasons for it, including licensing concerns if they apply.

Spell out the rules, including "fine points" like the fact that closing time means the time the children are out of the building, *not* when parents are expected to arrive.

Reiterate the message frequently in newsletters and at parent meetings. Post a notice on your parent bulletin board.

If the situation has already gotten out of hand, inform parents that fees and other restrictions will no longer be waived. Or clearly set out your new policy.

Consider changing your operating hours. The strictly nine-to-five workday is becoming increas-

ingly uncommon. People are expected to work later and later.

If licensing regulations permit, you might want to survey your parents to ascertain whether they'd be willing to pay more in exchange for the center remaining open for an extra half hour or hour each day.

Before surveying, determine whether staff members are willing and able to work later.

If there is enough support, and the move can be made financially feasible, you may want to extend your hours.

Constant Complainers

Marblehead Children's Center in Marblehead, Massachusetts had a parent who never seemed to be pleased.

"She was complaining about everything — all little, picayune things," according to **Rosanne Phelan**, owner and director.

"For example, she'd say she wasn't informed when her child needed new diapers. The teachers said they did inform her.

"She told me they weren't paying attention to her concerns. I knew that wasn't likely, because our center is very family-oriented. We try to embrace the family as part of the center.

"I tell my teachers that they have to be able to defend the policies and philosophy of the center."

"The mother had an interesting demeanor. She was very stern. We tend to expect that from people from some other cultures, and we find it more understandable. But she was intimidating.

"The teachers were exasperated. They would anticipate her coming and become nervous. They would come in each day and report every word.

"Dealing with her really took an inordinate amount of time."

What Was the Outcome of This Episode?

"The woman ended up staying. In fact, she turned around to become one of our biggest advocates."

What Made That Happen?

"I believe it's because we persevered.

"I would model for the teachers how to act. I'd ask the mother, 'How are you?' and 'How was work today?' I'd try to get the issue away from picking up her child.

"Talking to her helped. I tried to be instructive. I explained developmental principles.

"When she complained specifically about a teacher, I'd answer in a more general way; indirectly. If for example, she said, 'He has no friends there, and the teachers don't do anything about it,' I would explain that developmentally, children at that age are into parallel play.

"In time, her negative attitude dissipated.

"I think she acted the way she did because it was her first child. It was her fear, insecurity and guilt that led her to constantly complain.

"By the time she left the center, she hugged us and thanked us for giving her child a wonderful experience."

Pressure for Academics

At Marblehead Children's Center, "we deal with the push for academics constantly," says Rosanne Phelan.

How Do They Respond?

"We try to educate the parent one-on-one. But when it seems to be almost universal, we send home letters explaining the philosophy of providing developmentally appropriate activities. Of course, those letters aren't always read.

"We also try to explain to parents how instructive play is; giving them what they want, but showing how play leads to it. We explain, for example, pre-reading and pre-math activities.

"They put a lot of pressure on the teachers. When the teachers tell me that parents complain that the alphabet should be displayed in the room, I tell them, 'Not in isolation.' They can introduce letters through their journals and other activities, but I don't want the alphabet up there.

"I tell my teachers that they have to be able to defend the policies and philosophy of the center."

Complaints About Other Children

When one child's behavior negatively affects others in the class, the center often must maintain its balance on a philosophical tightrope.

On one side is the understandable distress of the parents who believe that their children are being harmed, and on the other are the needs of the misbehaving child and his or her family.

Biting

Kitty Lovingood, director of **Fiddlestix Child Care Center** in Toledo, Ohio, had a child enrolled "who was a very aggressive biter, and it continued into his third year.

"He bit several children, but tended to single out one or two."

The parent of one of those "singled-out" children became very upset, and suggested that the biter be removed from the program. That request was denied, as the boy was pleasant and well-adjusted most of the time.

His parent cooperated, and even went to far as to — without the approval of the center — threaten him each day that he'd be spanked at home if he bit anyone.

When one child's behavior negatively affects others in the class, the center often must maintain its balance on a philosophical tightrope.

For a time, "he actually would stop mid-bite, with his mouth open, en route," says Kitty Lovingood, "but eventually, he started again."

How Did They Deal With the Problem?

The center checked with his pediatrician and dentist, who found no physical cause for the biting.

"Our concern was to help the parent of the child being bitten," says the director. "We had to explain, 'We can't give up on a child. Put yourself in the position of the parent of the boy who bites. How would you like us to treat your child?' "

They invited her to come in for two hours and observe the biter. "The parent saw that he wasn't a mean little monster. He didn't hit or bully others, but he bit. She also realized that it was impossible for the teachers to see all the children at once. Someone may turn away for a moment to wipe a nose.

"It answered the typical question, 'Can't somebody watch these kids?' The parent began to realize that it's not neglect and something we can always control. She acknowledged that there were good activities and good supervision.

"I wish I had done that sooner. Of course, before I invited her in, I talked to the mother of the biter, to make sure she didn't object. I told her I'd like a parent to come in and see the daily routine and observe her son.

"Looking back, maybe we'd try more one-on-one meetings with the parent of the child being bitten."

The biting gradually stopped. Says Kitty Lovingood, "As the child became more verbal and could comprehend our words, we'd tell him, 'Put your teeth on your skin. It hurts.' Plus, he learned to use *his* words."

Bad Language

Michelle Amodei, director of **Grove City YMCA Learning Center** in Grove City, Pennsylvania, had an irate parent threaten several times to remove his child from the program if another child wasn't forced to leave.

The four-year-old classmate was frequently using an obscene word, sometimes in anger and other times in conversation. The parent was upset because his own child had started to use the word at home.

He complained to the teacher, who referred him to the director. "At one point," says Michelle Amodei, "he threatened that if the other boy wasn't removed from the program in a week or two, he'd pull his child out."

She responded that the center would do its best to stop the bad language, but wouldn't terminate services for the offending child. "I had no intentions of doing that," she says, "because he comes from a very unstable home situation, and in my opinion he desperately needed the consistency and positive environment we provide here."

Seeking Compromise

When the parent then insisted that the two children be completely separated and not permitted to play

together, "We put them in different classes in the afternoon, but couldn't do anything about the morning, so we kept them together."

The compromise worked. The parent kept his child enrolled and had no further complaints.

Solving the Basic Problem

The center concluded that both children were using the forbidden word for attention, says Michelle Amodei.

The first boy "knew it would get a reaction from everyone around him. The other one noticed the reaction and decided to say it himself, including in front of his sister. He loved the mayhem he was causing.

"We found several techniques to be successful in eliminating the swearing, including ignoring it, offering alternatives like 'oh, gosh' and nonchalantly reminding, 'We don't use those words here.'

"One thing that worked very well was that every time the child used the word, the teacher would react humorously, to take the attention off of him. She'd use a silly-sounding word like 'marshmallow.'

"When the staff stopped showing undue concern and the child began to get more attention doing other things, he got bored with it and stopped. And we didn't damage his self-esteem in the process."

Poor Parenting Skills

Encouraging misguided or inexperienced parents to adopt more enlightened practices calls for diplomacy.

Berating or shaming can alienate them, lower their self-esteem and even lead them to withdraw their children, thereby removing any possible help the center might have extended.

Kitty Lovingood cites examples of poor parenting she has encountered at her center.

"Some parents no longer work at the same place, but don't bother to give us a new way to contact them.

"There are very young mothers who bring in pop or Kool-Aid in baby bottles.

"We've even had parents who say, 'Give her water. I have no money.' "

The center has one group for infants under one year and another for those from the first birthday through the eighteenth month. "When their babies are ready to make the transition, we encourage parents to bring in table food instead of jars of baby food. Some bring in inappropriate items, like hot dogs and crackers."

Changing Parent Behavior

To help educate parents about proper nutrition, the center makes use of outside expertise.

"We provide materials like copies of the USDA minimum daily requirements for babies, and booklets on well-balanced diets. We display posters, too, like one from the American Dental Association showing tooth damage from leaving bottles in children's mouths."

However, the center will not tolerate parents denying their babies proper nutrition because they claim not to have enough money.

"I give the parent an hour to bring in the formula," says Kitty Lovingood. "He or she can call someone, or I'll buy it and require the parent to reimburse me.

"It's usually not neglectful parents who do that, but those who don't manage money well."

Please join this ongoing dialogue by sharing your ideas on these topics and other parent problems. To do so, contact Christine Kalbaugh, publisher.

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Staff Teams in Child Care: The Village School of Boxford

This is the second in a series of periodic JCCA articles reporting on how different centers interpret and execute the team concept. For this article, we spoke with Susan Sahovey.

Introduction

Susan Sahovey is administrative director of The Village School of Boxford in Boxford, Massachusetts. She teaches early childhood courses at Endicott College, and prior to holding her current position was director of two other schools.

The Village School's east and west campuses are together licensed for 175 children between the ages of two and five.

Q You refer to "teams" and "work groups." How do you define those terms?

A Teams are classroom co-teaching teams. The east and west work groups are the staffs at our two campuses.

Q What aims do you have for the work groups?

A Besides working as teams within their own schools, we want the teachers to share between the campuses.

When I was hired, the board asked me to accomplish several goals. The biggest one was to make the two campuses into one school, with consistency in curriculum and policies.

That goal was overwhelming in itself. The campuses are five miles apart, and five years ago, they were also worlds apart. The east campus was the original school. It was a traditional nursery school and had been operating for many years when the west campus, which began as a form of parent co-op, was started in 1981.

The two campuses had no staff meetings together and no shared notices. Now that's changing, and the staffs are learning to work together and view themselves as part of one school.

I put out a newsletter every other Wednesday. It deals with general school happenings, like photos, sing-alongs and new teachers. It also addresses rumors, like a recent untrue story that the east campus was closing. Once a month, the board chair uses the back of the newsletter for "Board News."

Q How are your co-teaching teams structured?

A When I first arrived, there was a traditional, typical setup, with lead teachers and assistant teachers.

With restructuring, there are no more lead teachers. They're all co-teachers.

Each team is composed of two or three teachers, depending on the size of the class.

Q Why do you favor co-teaching over the traditional structure?

A It's related to the philosophy of the school.

If it's a developmental preschool, each child is allowed to grow at his or her own rate. You have to follow each child's progress and how the child is changing.

That's daunting for one teacher, who can have up to thirty-six children coming in on different days and at different times. How can you know how they're developing when you have thirty-six children? Often, under the old system, when parents came in for January conferences, the teachers didn't really know how their children were doing.

I also found that there was a great deal of competition and condescension under the old structure. The assistant teachers were often relegated to doing the routine, lower-level tasks.

Q How did you present your team idea?

A I asked teachers questions like, "If this is a developmental preschool, how should the room look? What should you be doing?"

They began to see that they were just managing a room, and not getting to know the children. They had been running a teacher-directed program.

Q Did lead teachers still resist co-teaching?

A Some lead teachers did find it threatening.

Before I arrived, lead teachers and assistant teachers had been paired together for an average of fifteen years. For a long time, they had been offered the opportunity to become co-teachers, but in order to do so, the lead teachers would have had to take a salary cut.

One team had worked together for twelve years when the lead teacher began to be pressured to take a pay cut. They worked together for about another twelve years under that pressure.

Q How did you resolve that problem?

A A major step was developing a salary matrix similar to those for public schools.

Payment is related to education and experience. Someone with a bachelor's degree, for example, would earn a higher salary than someone else with an associate's degree.

However, the person who is paid less is still considered a qualified teacher, equal to the one with more experience and education.

When the salary matrix was put into effect, no pay cuts were necessary. It equalized the situation; took the pressure off.

One former lead teacher, after six months as a co-teacher, said that she was doing less work than before but getting the same pay.

Q How did you determine team composition?

A For the first year, I kept working partnerships intact.

I observed, got input and interviewed people. I tried to determine individual communication styles and how well current working relationships were operating.

I did a profile on each teacher. I asked them to write answers to questions like, "Who are you working with this year? How is it going? What has and hasn't succeeded? Do you want to continue working with that person? What age group of children would you prefer?"

Then I asked how each teacher would feel about working with a particular person.

All of this was confidential. It wasn't shared with the board or other staff members.

One conclusion I came to is that it's not a good idea to put together two right-brain or two left-brain people. There's likely to be constant underlying conflict. I mixed left-brain, right-brain and mid-brain people.

If teams are working well, I leave them in place year after year. If the chemistry is wrong, I change them. The teachers like the idea that they can change to other partners, but also accept that they have to try to work things out.

Q What was your time frame for developing teams?

A It was basically: **Year 1:** Observation, **Year 2:** Implementation of Teams, **Year 3:** Getting the Kinks Out, **Year 4:** Building on Teamwork Skills, **Year 5 and beyond:** Further Refinement.

Q How do the teams operate on a daily basis?

A They share all duties.

While one person is doing teacher-assisted activities, the other is roaming — helping, but also documenting how the children are doing.

Every teacher gets the opportunity to work with cognitive, language, fine motor, gross motor and social skills.

There is rotation in leading meeting and circle times.

Q Who is responsible for planning?

A All team members are responsible for all planning. They meet and put together ideas they come up with or that are suggested by children or parents.

They have one plan book, which they developed themselves. It details how they're going to apply the current theme in each day's activities, and indicates who is responsible for getting materials for each project or for other preparation.

Parents or substitutes can look at the book and understand what's going on.

Q How is the children's progress assessed?

A We took away all the old checklists. Instead, we came up with a list of about twenty goals for each age. Each year, we tweak the lists — add or subtract items.

Basically, they call for three-year-olds to get used to school and four-year-olds to learn skills like following directions and anticipating.

Village School Goals

Three-Year-Olds	Four- and Five-Year-Olds
Personal and Social Development	
Takes Care of Bathroom Needs	Developing Personal Self-Help Skills
Dresses Self With Minimal Help	Works Well Independently
Separates From Parents Without Difficulty	Cooperates With Clean-Up
Helps With Room Clean-Up	Finishes A Task
Developing Self-Control	Participates Willingly in Most Activities
Willing to Try New Activities	Follows Two-Step Directions
Follows Classroom Routine	Shares and Cooperates With Others
Learning to Share With Others	Exhibits Self-Control
Language and Literary Development	
Communicates Effectively (speaks clearly)	Communicates Effectively (shares verbally in a group)
Participates in Music and Rhyme	Retells a Story
Shows Interest in Books	Anticipates Story Line
Listens to Stories	Attentive During Group Time
Learning to Listen During Group Time	Shows Interest in Writing Name
Recognizes Name	Recognizes Letters in Name
Cognitive Development	
Beginning to Recognize Colors	Recognizes and Names Colors
Matches Shapes	Recognizes and Names Shapes
Copies a Pattern	Develops a Pattern
Shows Interest in Counting	Recognizes Numerals
	Understands One/One Correspondence
Motor Development	
Tears/Cuts Paper	Cuts With Scissors With Control
Attempts to Use Writing Tools	Uses Writing Tools With Control
Developing Large Motor Skills	Developing Large Motor Skills

Village School goals are used as a base for documenting the development of each child in our program throughout the year. These goals are not expected to be mastered until the end of the school year. Every child grows and learns at different rates and may not necessarily master all the expectations at the same time.

Remember, childhood is a journey, not a race.

If there are two co-teachers in a class, each is responsible for assessing half of them.

Q Has the whole staff adjusted to teams?

A Those who were unwilling to change are no longer here. New teachers are hired with teams in mind, so they're positive from the beginning.

Q Are your teams empowered?

A Yes. They have a great deal of freedom to create and to do what they need to do. All I ask is, "Why are you doing this? Is it in the best interests of the

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children in your classroom? Is it educationally sound?" Those are the key questions. If it's not in the best interests of the children, why are we doing it?

I don't dictate curriculum. They just have the year's goals. My message is, "If you want to do rocks, do rocks."

I try to act as a support person as much as possible. If something's not working, I brainstorm with them.

What I want is openness. I want to be approachable and to be able to approach them. The comfort level is continually increasing.

Q How are teams assessed?

A When I started here, there was no evaluation process. I don't believe you can grow as a teacher without feedback.

One teacher told me, "No one ever held me accountable for what goes on in my classroom." My answer was, "Maybe no one cared."

The first year, I evaluated teachers individually on the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale.

Now, the team evaluates itself. At a staff meeting, we developed a list of elements essential for good teamwork. From that, I created a team evaluation form that each team member is asked to complete.

Q What are the keys to team success?

A I believe that everyone needs to have:

- A sense of humor
- Willingness to hear and accept ideas of others
- Ability to adapt to change
- Support and trust for other members
- Willingness to resolve, rather than avoid issues
- Dedication
- Empowerment to make important decisions

Q Do women tend to find it harder than men to work as teams?

A I do believe there's a gender issue. The team concept is difficult for many women because they haven't been trained for it.

Women tend to compete. They often deal on an emotional level and find it difficult to handle issues impersonally, without involving their self-esteem.

They can have a hard time using "I" messages; saying, for instance, "I am uncomfortable when you come in late each day. Can I help you? Is there a problem?" instead of, "If you do this to me one more time ... " or stewing over something and finally blowing up.

Typically, when women are in work situations, they don't express their dissatisfactions. They stew instead. They haven't been taught to deal with someone who does something they don't like. They're afraid of being too aggressive.

You want caring and sensitive people in this field, but they have to get past not wanting to hurt someone's feelings. They need to become assertive without being aggressive. They also have to learn how to take constructive advice.

Q How do you help teams that have difficulty with handling dissatisfaction?

A Sometimes I have to intervene. When I observe something going wrong with a team, I point it out and ask the teachers, "Are you feeling the same thing? Am I right or wrong?"

Those with assertiveness problems or low self-esteem tend to say, "No, everything is fine." I have to tell them, "It's not fine. Here's what I see. You count on the other person to set up at five minutes to nine, but when the children come in, it's not set up."

I create a written action plan. I tell them, "Here's what needs to be changed." I give them a timetable.

For other teams, just mentioning the problem is enough.

Q How do your teams make decisions?

A You need a way to reach consensus at a meeting. You need to reach a comfort level, with everyone on the team pulling in the same direction.

With a new group, the most important issue is how you're going to achieve consensus. It takes work. You can't always do it in a two-hour meeting. You can table the idea and bring it up at a later meeting. But you agree not to talk about it while it's on the table. That way, you don't have people jockeying for votes.

You work through that issue before going to the next agenda item.

A consultant taught us how to play "Earthquake." It's a good technique for teaching consensus.

The premise is that you're with a group of people in a basement after an earthquake. You're given twelve tasks.

First, individuals are told to put the tasks in order of priority. Then the participants are divided into two groups. Each group needs to reach consensus on the priorities.

There's a lot of communicating and having to hear other people's ideas. You make sure that everyone is participating. It teaches people how to work with each other.

Q What other exercise do you recommend to help teams make decisions?

A This is a good technique for drawing everyone into decision-making, so that one or two people don't dominate it:

Give each person a metal loop with a green, a yellow and a red square. If a subject comes up, they're asked to display the proper square. A green square means "I Agree," a yellow one means "I have a question," and a red square indicates "I totally disagree."

The lead person asks, "What are you uncomfortable with?" It doesn't involve personalities or bring animosity.

Q Do you have anything to add?

A I've been developing teams for over twenty years. It's hard to initiate. But it is so superior, in the quality of classroom work and the creativity of teachers.

During development, there have been situations that were hurtful to me and to others, but everyone comes out better in time.

The children benefit tremendously. They get much more individual attention.

Teachers have a lighter load. The work isn't wearing them out. They go from tired teachers to joyful teachers. They start to enjoy their jobs again.

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THE VILLAGE SCHOOL OF BOXFORD TEAM SELF-EVALUATION

The first step in developing a self-assessment tool was for each team to meet and create a list of what its members considered to be important qualities for teams.

Those lists were shared with the entire staff, which worked together to consolidate and prioritize the elements.

These are the major headings in the final list compiled by the staff:

- **Communication**
- **Flexibility**
- **Taking Initiative**
- **Accountability - Individual and Team**
- **Collaboration**
- **Professional Respect - Pride in Work**
- **Sense of Humor**

Under each heading, the staff noted the practices that they believed would lead to that goal. For example:

Collaboration

- sharing of ideas and materials
- sharing of philosophies, goals, expectations
- sharing of talents

The 14 multiple-choice and 3 open-ended questions on the form were derived from the staff's responses.

Each multiple-choice question is to be answered with a number from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest rating. Brief descriptions accompany the numbers as:

How are team decisions made?

1) no decision 2) made by one 3) majority 4) attempts to include 5) full participation

The questions are below. These directions accompany the form:

Attached is the team evaluation form that has been created from our discussion at the last staff meeting. Each person has received one set.

It needs to be done individually and privately. Please do not sit together and fill it out.

Please don't try to put down what you think I want to see or your team member wants to see. Please put down what you think is happening within the team.

This is a diagnostic tool, not a pass/fail test. It is important to be honest in order to see improvement or positive change.

Complete the form and pass it back in. It will be compiled and summarized and the summary will be shared with your team.

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Team Self-Evaluation

1. How well does the team share ideas and materials?
2. How often do team members discuss teaching and classroom goals, expectations and philosophies?
3. How are team decisions made?
4. How much trust and openness is there in the team?
5. How well do team members listen to each other?
6. How are differences or conflicts handled in the team?
7. How well does the team share responsibility?
8. How well prepared is the team for each school day?
9. How well do team members share information regarding children and classroom families?
10. How much flexibility is there between team members to change?
11. How well do team members anticipate each other's need through the daily routine?
12. Does your team share professional respect among members?
13. How much loyalty and sense of belonging to the team is there?
14. How is the team working?

As a team, what worked well this year?

As a team, what could have worked better?

As a team, what new curriculum units have you developed this year?

Economizing While Preserving Quality: Interview With Victoria Speaks-Folds, Part 2

Victoria Speaks-Folds, Ed.D., is vice president of education at Tutor Time Learning Systems. She previously held positions as assistant principal of a private school, and center owner and director.

In Part 1 of this article, Dr. Speaks-Folds discussed how to develop systems, maintain the physical facility and train, utilize and reward staff so as to save money and at the same time ensure a quality program. Here, she covers other aspects of the topic.

Dealing With Vendors

Organizing and planning your purchases can make a tremendous difference, not only by saving you substantial money and time, but by helping your center to run smoothly by ensuring that materials are on hand when you need them.

Instead of remaining virtually anonymous and automatically paying list price and full shipping and handling charges, Victoria Speaks-Folds advises, do all you can to make your center important to your vendors.

Establish relationships with them, and work on getting discounts and reducing or eliminating charges. Ways she suggests:

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➡ Try to order from as **few vendors** as possible. The more you buy from a company, the more important your business is to that firm, and the more likely you are to get discounts and other preferential treatment.

Systematically compare the learning materials and equipment offered by several vendors. Make a list of those that most consistently provide the best value for the best prices, and make most of your purchases from them.

➡ A single center can maximize its buying clout by **organizing its purchases** into several large orders placed at specific times of the year. The size of your order may generate a discount or free shipping.

Good times for such purchases: July for fall enrollment, January for mid-year needs and April for summer programs.

➡ Plan a **monthly meal menu** and buy food in bulk from your vendor.

➡ Consider placing **combined orders** with other neighborhood centers, so that you each pay less per item.

➡ Many large school supply vendors offer **free workshops** at your facility. This is a good way to strengthen relationships with them. They may provide new items to be tested or sell discontinued products at a discounted price.

➡ Visit your **vendors' booths** at early childhood conferences. This is another way to bring your center to their attention. Often, you can buy display items at reduced cost on the last day of a conference.

➡ Vendors love **letters of appreciation**. Be sure to thank those that donate goods or offer discounts. Have the children draw pictures for vendors to display. This also helps to publicize your program.

Two more hints for wise buying from Victoria Speaks-Folds:

➡ Keep accurate lists of what you buy and use them to create a **yearly purchasing list**. This will minimize spur-of-the-moment buying and shorten and streamline the whole ordering process.

➡ Buy only **basic tempera paint colors** and encourage teachers to allow children to mix paints to get secondary colors. Include white paint, so that pastels can be mixed as well.

Finding Inexpensive Materials

Low-cost and free items are all around you. Develop the habit of being on the lookout for them.

Systematize your search by periodically tapping various sources, and don't be afraid to ask.

Finally, be sure to fully utilize what you already have on hand. Advice from Victoria Speaks-Folds:

❑ Visit **local businesses** and ask for learning material donations. Their throw-aways might be your treasures.

❑ Display **parent business cards** on a bulletin board in your main hallway. Think about each place of business in terms of materials you might be able to request. Examples:

If a parent works at a printing company, you can ask for excess sheets, scraps, rolls and strips (to make chains) of paper; outdated holiday or wedding catalogs and other materials they would normally discard.

Ask a parent employed at a carpet company for swatches to use in a texture-matching game, large carpet squares for children's floor seating or remnants to use for other creative purposes.

❑ Use vendor **catalogs** to help label classroom shelves. Use sentence strip paper, a picture and the printed word for a print-rich environment.

❑ Be on the alert for **innovative companies** that offer bargains. One is Creative Educational Surplus (see **JCCA** Issue 203), which sells new items salvaged from industry for use in classrooms and other educational settings. The company buys in bulk, and its prices are low.

Catalogs are divided into sections, such as *Art Materials*, *Math and Science* and *Teaching Tools*, and ideas are given for using individual items.

One example from a recent catalog: 8 plastic petri dishes, $1.95. Suggested uses: sorting, counting, mixing paint, molding play dough, planting grass seed. Call for a catalog: (800) 886-6428.

❑ Establish a teacher resource area in your center for **recyclable materials**.

You can set aside space in a teachers' room or a

storage area, or use boxes with lids in classrooms.

Ask parents to do "treasure hunts" for upcoming projects. You can list the needed items on the parent bulletin board. Always include magazines, catalogs, empty toilet paper rolls and empty margarine tubs and lids.

Children can participate at home, collecting items like toilet paper holders, or sorting — saving the towelette containers for the wipes their parents use on their younger sisters or brothers, for example.

By collecting and working with recyclable materials, children are not only getting supplies that enrich their learning, but are becoming aware of the environment as well.

The materials can also be used to make inexpensive games and teacher aids. There are many how-to books on the subject.

❑ Contract with a **book club** company.

The company is likely to have a policy whereby it will donate books to the center, based on a percentage of its sales to your parents. This builds up your library at no cost to you.

Some book companies provide other free materials if children from the center join and order books.

Sharing What You Know

One important measure of quality is willingness to share your expertise.

When you help to educate parents and others, you perform a public service. At the same time, you establish yourself as an authority, gain stature in your community and generate excellent publicity for your center.

One suggestion by Victoria Speaks-Folds:

Provide speaker nights for parenting topics.

This is a way to establish your center as a valuable, credible community resource.

Invite just parents from your center or open your meetings to all who want to attend. If you're limiting the audience, it's a good idea to hold the event at pick-up time. The children can help prepare a simple meal to share with their parents at the meeting. Parents won't have to make extra trips to the center or provide dinner.

You can be the speaker. If not, look to your staff and to local sources.

Just a few "hot" parent topics: discipline, family activities, developmental expectancies.

Providing Adjunct Services

Look for ways to use your facility when it's normally empty. You may be able to generate extra income by offering special services.

Check with your licensing agency to make sure that you're permitted to provide care outside of regular hours, and to determine whether there are special rules you have to follow.

And remember that to make a supplementary program work, you need the input and support of staff. Two ideas from Victoria Speaks-Folds:

▲ Offer a **"Parents' Night Out"** on a weekend evening or during the holidays.

Charge a reasonable fee to care for children from 7:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.

The evening could include a video movie, popcorn and games. Children can bring sleeping bags and wear their pajamas.

To plan the event, Victoria Speaks-Folds advises:

▲ Give parents questionnaires to determine whether they're interested, when they would like it to be (once a month, just at holiday time, etc.), how many children they would send, the children's ages and other basic questions.

▲ Find out whether others in the neighborhood are offering this service, and at what price. Or ask in the questionnaire, "Would you be willing to pay $__ for three hours of evening care?"

▲ Determine how much to pay staff, keeping in mind that you have to pay at least time and a half for evening work. In some areas, parents are permitted to pay teachers directly.

▲ Keep the same staff/child ratios as during the day, unless the law requires otherwise.

▲ Prepare for the different age groups, with age-specific and time-specific activities.

"Make sure that it works out well for you financially, taking into account food, materials, compensation and other expenses. You want to help parents, but you want to make money as well.

"Keep in mind that the idea is not to have a child who came in at 7 a.m. stay until midnight. You have to close the center in between, or you're not helping children."

▲ Provide **weekend birthday parties** for registered families.

Establish a package pricing.

Parents can choose from several themes. You provide the entertainment, cake and accessories. Children can play outdoors and have games and refreshments inside.

You can contract with a photographer. Parents can purchase the photos, and you can use them to publicize your center and the birthday events.

Final Words

"There are many ways to economize without risking the quality of your program," says Victoria Speaks-Folds.

"Striving for quality and economizing shouldn't be short-term. It's an ongoing way of life. Overspending has no place in running a center."

And she offers one last tip: "Carry return address labels with you to conferences and place them on entry cards for give-aways and drawings. Someone has to win!"

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I Am Your Child

The Campaign Is Succeeding

JCCA has actively participated in the national *I Am Your Child* campaign since its inception in 1997.

Founded by Rob Reiner, Michele Singer Reiner and Ellen Gilbert, the campaign's goal is to raise public awareness of the importance of early childhood development, so that our nation becomes deeply committed to its young children.

It has educated millions of parents and professionals about groundbreaking new brain research that reveals that the first three years of life are critical to children's emotional and intellectual growth.

Excite Web Site

The Internet media company Excite is participating in the *I Am Your Child* campaign by offering a comprehensive service, First Years, to provide vital, age-specific information for parents and caregivers.

Among the options:

- *Enter the week of a pregnancy to obtain information and view images relevant to that stage of fetal development.*
- *Enter a baby's age to get information on that developmental stage.*
- *Enter a pregnancy due date or a child's birth date to receive updated information on a personalized Web page each time you visit the site.*
- *Access information and resources on adoption.*
- *Learn more about the I Am Your Child campaign.*
- *Participate in message boards on adoption and child development.*
- *Visit Web sites recommended by First Years and the I Am Your Child campaign.*
- *Browse books about pregnancy and early childhood development.*
- *Learn about breast-feeding, childbirth classes, infant care and other specific interests.*
- *Gain extensive information on the entire topic of early childhood.*

First Years is at (**firstyears.excite.com**).

For *I Am Your Child* materials, contact:

I Am Your Child
335 North Maple Drive, Suite 135
Beverly Hills, CA 90210
(310) 285-2385

Ten Ways to Retain Staff: Interview With Leigh M. Zaleon

Leigh M. Zaleon is executive director of Victory Village Day Care Center at The University Child Care Center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

She has presented workshops on staff retention and has written on the subject.

Victory Village services students, faculty and other staff at the university. It is licensed for 140 children, ages six weeks to five years.

Retention and Consistency

For her workshops on staff retention, Leigh Zaleon adds the word "consistency" to her titles. "When you retain staff, the children have more consistency," she says.

She was moved to write and speak on the topic after other directors asked why her center seemed to have far less turnover than most.

She began to carefully analyze and document the policies that she was following, read extensively on the topic and interview other directors with good records.

The ten practices below are the distillation of her experience and research.

1. Make wise hiring decisions.

"I do an initial screening interview over the phone or in person. I want to determine whether the candidate shares the center's philosophies in behavior management, parent/staff relations and other major areas.

"The second step is to have the person spend time — usually about two or three hours — in classrooms, to see if he or she puts those stated ideas into practice. I say, 'Dress comfortably, and be prepared to interact with the children and get involved.'

"After the visit, I check with the staff, to see what they think about hiring the candidate.

"If everyone feels good about the choice, I check references and offer the position."

2. Emphasize staff development.

"All the research I've found says that professional development contributes to confidence and self-esteem.

"It also indicates that most centers with low turnover have bonus systems to compensate staff for professional development.

"North Carolina is more fortunate than many states because it has Smart Start, an early childhood initiative which in our county gives teachers supplements as they increase their education. We also have TEACH, a scholarship project funded through the state.

"But even before those programs, Victory Village paid for books and tuition if staff members enrolled in early childhood programs at the local community college or the university.

"When they completed each semester, they'd get a percentage increase. They'd also receive an increase on reaching each milestone — for earning associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees.

"Now with the state programs, we can reward them more frequently. We use TEACH for tuition, books, travel expenses, substitutes and similar items, and our own funds for more frequent raises. Our money goes into the teachers' pockets."

3. Recognize individual differences among staff.

"Just as we expect teachers to respect individual differences in children, as directors we should recognize the different needs and abilities of staff members.

"For example, some teachers want lots of feedback. Others would rather be left alone for the most part and be given occasional feedback. This is in line with Lilian Katz's idea of different levels of teaching; that there are different needs at each level."

4. Pay as well as you can.

"We'd all like to pay a lot more than we do. To make up for the difference, we can accommodate staff in other ways.

"We can give them extra breaks if they need them. If a staff member needs a day off, or to come in late, and we have to go in to replace the person, we should respect that. In fact, we can initiate it by saying, 'Why don't you come in a couple of hours late?'

"It ends up being reciprocal. When we need them to stay late or take on an extra duty, they're likely to want to accommodate us."

5. Show appreciation.

"This ties in with number four. Do special favors, like bringing in donuts or lunch, or writing notes saying, 'You're doing a great job.' Make them realize that you appreciate them."

6. Lead collaboratively. Get input.

"You need to work cooperatively, but with leadership.

"I have a staff meeting every month, and sometimes more frequently. I make final decisions, but I solicit the staff's advice on major issues.

"For example, our building was designed for us, but I was the only representative of the center on the design committee, which met for over a year. I got lots of input from my staff. I'd ask them questions like, 'What would you like in your classroom?'

"Other examples are having them help decide how duties will be assigned and other day-in, day-out concerns."

7. Make sure communication and staff meetings are frequent.

"I'd recommend holding regularly-scheduled meetings once a month.

"Ours are held after closing time and are limited to two hours. The center provides dinner — the expense is included in the budget.

"It's also important for a director to have an open-door policy so staff can talk about their concerns."

8. Provide sufficient materials and resources.

"Staff members are more likely to stay if equipment is in good repair and they don't have to scramble for materials. It makes for a more pleasant, less stressful place to work.

"The articles I researched back this up. They show that people are more liable to stay where the equipment works and there are sufficient materials, even if they get less pay than at a center without them."

9. Participate.

"From my experience, I firmly believe that the director should always try to be visible in the classrooms.

"That doesn't mean that you just 'hang around' all day. It means that the staff knows they're your top priority, and that you'll jump in to help if necessary.

"The research backs this. It shows that when administrators are available, staff members feel needed and appreciated."

10. Advocate.

"Whenever I have an opportunity, I advocate for my staff.

"I work for higher salaries, bonuses, better conditions, lower ratios, improved licensing standards and other advances with everyone, including the board of directors, parents and the government."

For more information, contact:

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"Any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development."

Jerome Seymour Bruner, "The Process of Education"

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A CONVERSATION WITH FRED ROGERS

Introduction

"Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" is the longest-running program on national public television. Begun in 1968, it reaches approximately 8 million households and child-care settings each week.

Creator and host Fred Rogers is one of the most loved and respected public figures in America. He and the program have received every major award in the television industry.

Fred Rogers, who has a degree in music composition, writes all the scripts and songs for the program. He is an ordained Presbyterian minister.

Among his many honors are lifetime achievement awards from the Emmys and the Television Critics Association and two George Foster Peabody awards.

He has a star on Hollywood Boulevard, and in 1999 was inducted into the Television Hall of Fame. Dozens of organizations have cited him for his contributions to education, communications and early childhood, and close to forty colleges and universities have awarded him honorary degrees.

He was the keynote speaker at the 1998 conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children

"Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" is rooted not only in the deep empathy and affection that he personally holds for children, but in solid principles of child development and psychology as well.

Fred Rogers studied child development at the University of Pittsburgh, and for over thirty years regularly consulted noted psychologist and child-development specialist Dr. Margaret B. McFarland about how to best serve young children through the program. He has also utilized the expertise of members of his staff who are knowledgeable in those fields.

Family Communications, the nonprofit organization he founded in 1971, produces *"Mister Rogers' Neighborhood"* as well as materials in other media. It has several ongoing collaborations with early childhood professionals.

We recently spoke with Fred Rogers.

Q You have a deep understanding of children. Would you talk about your own family and childhood?

A My parents were wonderful people. I knew they cared about me.

I was the only grandchild on both sides for quite

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a while. When I was eleven, my parents adopted a baby girl. She's a wonderful person. She has two sons. I have two sons, too. I wouldn't have the joy of knowing those two nephews if my parents hadn't adopted my sister.

I grew up in a home of tradition. My mother did not work outside the home. Her great joy was giving gifts, particularly at Christmastime. Before she died, her list was up to 600 people. She and Dad had a wide circle of friends. Theirs was a big "neighborhood"; they knew people all over the world.

I was brought up to understand that one of the best things you can do is have ongoing relationships with people. That's why my invitation, "Won't you be my neighbor?" comes very naturally to me.

I was named for my maternal grandfather, Fred Brooks McFeeley. My name is Fred McFeeley Rogers. He lived in the country, about an hour away. We visited him almost every week for Sunday dinner.

He was the one who encouraged my individuation. Other people would tell me, "Be careful, Fred." He said, "Let the kid walk on the wall. He has to do things for himself." It's so important to be able to have that trust in yourself. That was a special day for me.

All of these things are passed on.

The other day, I was in Harrisburg at the governor's home, to receive a citation. A children's choir sang the Pennsylvania state song, the new one, and the old one started coming back to me.

I said, "You children gave me the greatest gift you could imagine. You reminded me of my childhood and of learning my state song." I started to sing it. I knew all the words, and it had been at least sixty years since I had heard it. If I heard a song for the first time yesterday, I couldn't remember the lyrics today.

Such is the profound influence of childhood.

Q When you were growing up, your parents encouraged you to "play" your feelings on the piano. You've said that you still use the piano to "laugh and cry and express rage," and you teach young children to use music and other means to express their feelings in positive ways.

How might a preschool use that concept?

A I think it's so important to listen — and I'm using that word in the broadest sense — to what the child finds a satisfying medium.

To me, it was the piano. To another child, it could be the medium of clay, and sculpting or pounding. To another child it's Lego; to another it's the dance; to another it's collage or painting.

Those who are around children affect their choices. But there are some innate kinds of expression that are mysteriously interwoven into our beings.

That's why I like to show on my program a whole smorgasbord of feelings.

I'll never forget what a parent told me after we had Yo-Yo Ma on the program. She said that her four-year-old son kept saying, "I do that." She thought it was a passing interest, but he insisted for a week, saying, "I do that." So his mother finally took him to a Suzuki class. He's now in high school, and he's still playing the cello. And his mother became so enamored with the cello that she's playing it, too.

"Those who are around children affect their choices. But there are some innate kinds of expression that are mysteriously interwoven into our beings."

It's so important to present a wide range of ways to express feelings.

Margaret McFarland once asked a sculptor to sit with a group of children and play with clay — just sit there and love the clay in front of the children. She told me that not before or since had the children in the class used the medium of clay so imaginatively as when that man simply loved the clay in front of the children.

The ultimate is the teacher who actually loves the *children*, because you know when you're in the presence of someone who values you. That's the height of teaching.

Q Your musical director, John Costa, doesn't play the piano in a simple way tailored for little children. His arrangements of the theme and other songs on the program are sophisticated and complex.

How can preschools help children to develop appreciation of good music?

A That applies to what we're talking about. It will only work if it's a kind of music that the teacher really loves.

I'd bring them a recording of Susan Starr playing Bach, because I love it so much.

The music is secondary. There are so many levels in every interchange in life; in our relationships. One level would be my enthusiasm for Bach, and for Susan Starr's playing. Another level is the child hearing Bach. You can't separate the levels.

If I hate Bach, I shouldn't introduce it in some purely technical way. It's as if someone would tell me, "You have to, by the end of the term, have children loving loud rock music." That would be an enormous challenge for me. I don't think I could do it, because I don't like it myself.

Q How do you view the influence of computers?

A No machine can ever take the place of a human being. That's one of the maior themes of the Neighborhood. When we go into a factory, for example, we try to show that it's the people who are important.

We have wonderful machines, including computers. They can enhance people's lives. But we must never allow our society to think that machines are more important than people.

"Today, younger and younger children are looking at screens — at one kind of screen or another."

Today, younger and younger children are looking at screens — at one kind of screen or another. We have to teach them to also look at and understand the map of the human face.

Child-care people are on the front lines, working with children every day. A question they, and all of us, have to ask is, "How do we make goodness attractive?"

Children are continually seeing someone knocking down a cartoon character or attacking a character in a computer game. There's insidious violence all around.

That's why we should use every creative molecule we have to make goodness attractive.

Q Where do we start?

A There is a great deal of accusation in life. We can become accusers or we can be advocates — appreciators of those who happen to be with us at the moment. They're the people I call our neighbors.

By being appreciators, we help to make goodness attractive.

There's a Hebrew word for Satan, and the same word means "accuser." A person with an accusing spirit is on the side of evil. A person with a spirit of appreciation is on the side of the holiest of spirits.

Q You call "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" a "program," rather than a "show."

Why do you make that distinction?

A I never had a class in acting.

I think the greatest gift you can give anyone is the gift of your honest self. That is the only truly unique gift.

I never thought of what we do as a "show." I think of it as a visit, a visit with a neighbor — one who wants to put on a sweater and sneakers and spend an hour with you.

The program has elements of drama, too, but not at a frenetic pace. So many programs are literally made in editing rooms. I believe that a real-life pace is very important to children.

Q You had a long professional association with Dr. Margaret B. McFarland, the prominent psychologist, until her death in 1988.

How did she influence you?

A She and I met about three times a month. She came to my office. I still call the chair she sat in "Margaret's chair."

I'd present my ideas for scripts and upcoming themes. She'd talk about children in the light of what I told her.

It was a wonderful collaboration. She would tell me stories of her wide, wide experience with young children. They informed everything that I did.

Once, she asked me to write a song about permissible regression. I thought, how in the world could I do that? She said that parents often think it's strange when their children go back to acting the way they did a year or two before. She said it was all right for a child to do that; that it was in the service of the ego.

That summer, that was the real challenge for me. I called her and asked, "What do you think of this?" She was always so enthusiastic. That was the beginning of the song, "Please Don't Think It's Funny." I still call it "Permissible Regression." It starts,

Please don't think it's funny,
When you want an extra kiss.
There are lots and lots of people
Who sometimes feel like this.

Later, it says,

In the long, long trip of growing
There are stops along the way,
For thoughts of all the soft things
And the look of yesterday.

For a chance to fill our feelings,
With comfort and with ease,
And then tell the new tomorrow,
"You can come now when you please."

Q Are your sensitivity and empathy for young children rooted in the good experiences and feelings of your childhood or in painful times?

A It's a combination.

For instance, I remember the excitement of the "Christmas factory." That's what we called our family working together in a kind of assembly line, preparing and wrapping all those gifts.

I remember people being pleased, but also getting annoyed when things went wrong.

Q What was the greatest lesson you learned from that family project?

A That it was another way of saying, "I love you."

The song, "There Are Many Ways," is a very important one. Margaret inspired it. She said, "There are many ways of saying 'I love you'; not just saying it with words."

Q Many children and parents write to you. What do they say?

A I'm quite taken with those who say, "Your program about" going to the hospital, or when a pet dies, or child care or divorce "came to us at just the right moment."

Of course, we don't control when a program is aired in their area, or when the family will have a crisis. But many families use the work that we offer and make it their own.

For example, they read our picture books and make them refer to their own situations. It's not adults simply reading words; it's adding the "parentheses" that makes those books at that moment available to them.

In the same way, teachers' parentheses are what make a book important. A teacher may be reading to children a book about a pet dying. Maybe a pet has died in the classroom. The teacher stops a moment to relate the story to the present life of the children.

Q Few men work in child-care centers today. Do you think that's detrimental to children's development?

A I'm going to say what's really in my heart.

My heart feels that it's the person, rather than the person's sex, that makes a difference in the life of a child.

I'm impressed, for instance, with people who are considered, I guess you might say, lesser members of society; how they often relate to children. People with obvious physical or mental disabilities — what great contributions they make in the lives of children!

The person has nothing to do with the outside. It has to do with who we are, not what our labels are.

There's a saying I keep right beside my chair. It's a quote from "The Little Prince." I look at it several times every day: "What is essential is invisible to the eye." That's a hallmark of what goes on here.

It can be a man who loves children or a woman who loves them.

It doesn't matter whether teachers are young women or older women, young men or older men.

It takes a very strong, dedicated person to go into what is probably the most important field in the world.

For more information, contact:

Fred Rogers
Family Communications
4802 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(412) 687-2990

"The Safe Havens Training Project," developed by Family Communications to help teachers and child-care providers support children who have witnessed violence, will be covered soon in **JCCA**.

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*Visit the **JCCA** Web site at www.netusa.net/~gary for a tribute to Fred Rogers and his staff.*

Training Staff To Build Relationships: Author Interview With Jeree H. Pawl

Book For Training Staff

ZERO TO THREE: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families is s nonprofit organization founded by leading pediatricians, researchers and child development specialists.

Its goal is to share knowledge with professionals, policymakers and parents in order to promote the healthy development of children through their first three years of life.

To that end, "**How You Are Is as Important as What You Do ... in making a positive difference for infants, toddlers and their families,**" by Jeree H. Pawl and Maria St. John, offers guidance for staff training and development.

Several kinds of stories based on the authors' experiences illustrate the book's basic premise, stated in the introduction — that "**human relationships are the foundations upon which children build the future**."

Using real-life situations, the authors indicate how those relationships grow not only from *what* we do with children, but at least as much from *how* we do it, and from the attitudes we convey in small increments over time.

They point out that "**the stories are not intended to 'teach a lesson,' but rather to stimulate individual reflection, encourage group discussion, and above all, honor the enormous complexity of the work in which we are all engaged**."

Format

This 44-page book uses three kinds of stories:

Vignettes

Most of these are in pairs that present alternate versions of the same situation involving a small child and an adult.

In both stories, the adult performs the same tasks, but the way he or she does so in each is very different.

Every vignette is followed by a brief discussion of what the child is likely to have learned from the encounter.

Scenarios

These portray important moments in relationships between children and adults — their first meeting or when there are problems, for example.

Although individual scenarios may depict parents, caregivers or home visitors, they illuminate aspects of human relationships that are universal. In addition, the authors encourage trainers to adapt the scenarios to make them most effective for their audiences.

"Stumpers"

These dramatize challenges that are inherent in working with young children and their families.

Several difficult situations that center personnel or home visitors may encounter are briefly set up — an irate parent confronts a teacher because his child has paint on her clothes is one example — and the reader or group is asked to consider ways to deal with the situation.

Five-Step Training

The book suggests five steps (**Analyze, Discuss, Reflect, Discuss, Adopt**) for training staff by using the stories. After each story or group of stories, "**For Trainers to consider**" gives suggestions for how to apply the five steps to those particular stories.

Talking With The Author

Co-author **Jeree H. Pawl**, Ph.D., is director of the Infant-Parent Program of San Francisco General Hospital, University of California, San Francisco. She is past president of ZERO TO THREE.

JCCA recently spoke to Dr. Pawl.

We asked whether she has received solutions for the book's "Stumpers."

"When we give workshops, we have a very positive response. Everyone understands that there is probably no perfect solution, but people relish the opportunity to think about it all," she said.

Her book offers six guiding principles for interacting with young children and their families.

1. **Behavior is meaningful**.

The book notes:

"Because behavior results from the interaction of many factors — including temperament, developmental stage, level of knowledge or skill, cultural background, and expectations of oneself and other people — the same behavior can have very different meanings.

"We cannot assume that our initial understanding of the meaning of another's behavior is correct, or complete. We must also realize that our own behavior is likely to mean different things to different people."

Jeree Pawl adds, "This principle sounds deceptively simple, but we often don't stop and think about what something means.

"We might say, 'We have a child, and he bites for no reason,' or 'He won't stay in his seat.' We often act as if there is no meaning in why this particular child is doing a particular thing at this particular moment.

"We may assume that the child is trying to be difficult or make us angry. We substitute our own responses for the child's intent.

"We often act as if there is no meaning in why this particular child is doing a particular thing at this particular moment."

"The principle holds with our relationships with adults. Their behavior and responses have meaning as well.

"You should never assume that you know, and we all do it too often.

"As professionals, our job is to be interested in what's really going on with people."

2. **Everyone wants things to be better**.

The book notes:

"*Everyone knows what he or she wants, and some people think they know what <u>other</u> people should want.*

"*In fact, you <u>can't</u> determine for other people what they should want.*"

Jeree Pawl adds, "We need to understand that people we work with — parents, children and colleagues — know more. We need to understand what *they* want to be better; not what *we* want to be better.

"You might be in someone's home. It's messy, and the furniture is broken. You may think you should offer advice about getting the house in order, but the person may be so depressed that it means nothing to him or her.

"If we see a child trying over and over to do something, getting frustrated and angry but not wanting to stop, we may not realize that mastering that task is important to the child.

"We may think it's just irritating behavior."

3. **You are yourself and your role**.

The book notes:

"*How you are able to be and what you are able to do in your life depend on the strengths and limitations you were born with; the experiences you have had, and how you have understood those experiences; the resources available to you; and the culture, community, and times you live in.*"

Jeree Pawl adds, "We fulfill any role in terms of who we are and what our experiences have been. There isn't any way to fill a role except with yourself.

"A person may have many different roles, both formal and informal. That can cause overlapping and conflicts.

"You need to get clear as to what your role is in a particular situation.

"You need to know the parameters of that role, and what aspects of your history and experience would be inappropriate. You can't properly fill a role if you allow your idiosyncrasies to distort it in some way."

4. **Don't just do something — stand there and pay attention**.

The book notes:

"...we are more likely to make a positive difference in the development of young children and families if we refrain from 'doing' and take time to observe carefully, consider the many possible meanings of what we have seen and heard, seek more information, and ask questions that demonstrate our respect, interest and capacity for empathy."

Jeree Pawl adds, "We tend to think that whenever there's a problem, we have to spring into action instantaneously.

"We need to learn that listening, being present, curious and interested *is* activity. Quiet, attentive listening may not seem like enough, but can be extremely helpful."

5. **Remember relationships**!

The book notes:

"It is not an easy task to establish and sustain the deep, responsive, and respectful relationships among adults and children that are the hallmark of quality, but it is an essential one."

Jeree Pawl adds, "What messages are we giving the people we are interacting with?

"We have to recognize the massive amount of information we convey to people when we interact. We do it through our attitude, what we tell them, how we speak.

"Are we communicating with warmth or coldness? Are our words and attitude dismissive or embracing?"

6. **Do unto others as you would have others do unto others**.

The book notes:

"We call this the 'platinum rule' of training, supervision and mentorship.

"How you are and what you do with colleagues, supervisees, and students becomes a model for how professionals and parents relate to each other, and how adults relate to the infants and toddlers in their care."

Jeree Pawl adds, "This principle is based on the belief that how you treat other people gets passed along.

"It happens all the time in our lives. You're on a highway, frantic because you're late for work, and despairing of getting into traffic. Someone lets you in. You'll do the same all the way to work.

"People you interact with will treat those with whom they're interacting in the same way.

"We have to recognize the massive amount of information we convey to people when we interact."

"ZERO TO THREE does a great deal of consulting to child-care centers. You can sense the tone that the director has set in each center — whether it's respectful or undermining and impatient."

Final Words

"People in the early childhood field don't always feel as powerful as they are," says Jeree Pawl.

"Even though they often don't get the respect they deserve, and despite their low pay, they should keep in mind that they're very important and can have a powerful influence on children's lives.

"It's a marvelous opportunity to help young children."

For more information, contact:

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To order "How You Are," contact:

ZERO TO THREE
(800) 899-4301

When Children Need Hospitalization: Author Interview With Nancy Keene

Book for Parents

To help a parent cope during a very difficult time, you can recommend, lend or give the book, "**Your Child in the Hospital: A Practical Guide for Parents**," by Nancy Keene and Rachel Prentice.

Written with sensitivity and common sense born of experience and knowledge, it offers solid, practical advice and seems to cover most of the situations that parents might encounter when a child is hospitalized.

Format

This softcover book with 160 pages of text is extremely thorough, spanning short- to long-term stays and dealing with emotions and human relations as well as more concrete matters.

Among the twenty chapters: ***Preparing Your Child***, ***Keeping Medical Records***, ***Common Procedures***, ***Telling the Staff Apart***, ***Insurance***, ***Siblings***, ***Communicating with Staff***, and ***Long-Term Illness: Keeping Family Life Going***.

The style is clear and direct. The book is logically organized, so that the reader can easily access specific topics.

Through sidebars in each chapter, more than forty parents whose children have been hospitalized offer first-hand insight by sharing situations that they encountered and how they handled them.

Toward the back of the book, a 21-page section, "***My Hospital Journal***," provides space for the child to express feelings and experiences in writing. Pages devoted to different aspects of the stay (*"What happens at night in the hospital," "What I miss from home"*) prompt the child to note particular sights, sounds, tastes, smells, impressions, facts and feelings.

"***Resources***" lists books and other materials for children and adults, as well as organizations that can help with matters like finances, handling stress and finding lodging near hospitals. There is also a packing list suggesting items to bring to the hospital.

Author Background

Co-author Nancy Keene has been intensely involved with hospitals on several levels.

She worked in one to help finance her education at the University of Virginia, teaming with medical professionals in various departments, including the critical care unit, emergency room and a blood bank.

For many years, she was a volunteer on a rescue squad that handled about five thousand calls a year. She rose through the ranks to become one of the first nationally registered paramedics in the country. She also taught advanced life support classes.

Nancy Keene has also seen hospitals from the patient's point of view. She has had numerous surgeries, both minor and life-threatening, including hospitalization and rehabilitation after a serious bicycle accident with a bus.

The personal experience most directly related to the topic of this book began in 1992. Her daughter, when she was just under four years old, was diagnosed with leukemia. That led to several years of virtually daily interaction with hospitals and other aspects of the medical world.

Speaking to the Author

JCCA interviewed Nancy Keene in order to gain information and guidance for you to pass on to your teachers, and for them to share with parents.

Q What is the ideal relationship between a patient — or in the case of a young child a patient's parent — and a doctor?

A I believe in forming a partnership that recognizes the need to respect one another's areas of expertise.

For parents, it's their child and their child's response to hospitalization and other experiences. For the doctor, there's the whole area of medical expertise.

The partnership should be based on responsibility, good communication and caring.

Q Do you see the parent's role basically as being the child's advocate?

A Yes. Parents should be advocates for their children, but they should be *friendly* advocates.

Q What are ways to be a friendly advocate?

A Here are examples of the approach I recommend:

- Use "I" statements like, "I'm concerned about _____, and I'd like to discuss it with you," rather than raise the subject in a way that causes conflict.
- Don't grab the doctor in the hospital hall and talk about what's bothering you. The doctor is busy, and you probably won't get the kind of thoughtful answer you need.

  Ask when it would be convenient to sit down with the doctor and have a chat. Set a time.
- Make a list of questions for when you have a conference with the doctor. Have them prioritized, and ask the most important ones first.

  If the doctor doesn't have time to answer all of your questions, you can say, "Maybe you can e-mail me about the others, or if you prefer, I can call and set up another appointment."

  But always ask in a respectful way.

Q What specific advice can you give regarding hospitalization of children up to five years old?

A One thing that concerns me is that many families feel it's best not to discuss the situations with their children and explain what's happening. That way, there are lots of scary surprises.

One way for child-care providers to help is to bring children's concerns to the attention of parents. If during the day a child asks questions about going to the hospital, the parents should be informed.

Q What should parents explain in advance?

A Obviously, a five-year-old needs a shorter and more concrete explanation than a fifteen-year-old.

One of the greatest fears of little children is separation. Tell them the truth.

I always stayed in my daughter's room. I said that I'd be there all the time, and that she could bring her stuffed animals, and could call her friends.

I let her know we were a team. I told her, "You have a disease in your blood. You'll have to take a lot of medicines. It's not going to be very pleasant, but I'll go through it with you."

Q What else can parents do to prepare a little child for the experience?

A This is *very, very* important.

Before going to the hospital, in addition to discussing what to expect, go on a tour of the hospital with the child. Every hospital I know gives tours.

Children that age are very concrete. They want to know who will talk to them, what the bed will be like, and so on.

The people who give the tours may show them the anesthesia masks and IVs and explain how they're used. They're usually very child-friendly.

Q Some hospital procedures have to be very frightening to a small child. What can be done to relieve the fear?

A I promised my daughter that everyone would explain what he or she was going to do.

When someone was going to begin a procedure — a lab person, nurse, doctor or student — I'd say, "My daughter is quiet and sensitive. Please explain what you're going to do before you begin, and please speak softly." I'd say these things in a very nice voice.

No one ever refused, but if they had said they were too busy to take the time to explain, I would have asked, again nicely, "Why don't you take care of whatever is so pressing and then come back?"

Q Your book advises decorating the hospital room to make it bright and cheerful, and planning enjoyable activities with your child. Would you give examples of how to have fun?

A A hospital can be very distressing, but you can make it so much better if you use your imagination. These are just a few ways:

- Play games
- Bring in "silly string"
- Bring in popcorn to pop in the microwave
- Order pizza to be delivered

- Have parties with children in neighboring rooms who are well enough to play
- Bring in dolls and other toys

There are some things that children like in hospitals, like the controls on the beds, the fact that they can order from their own menus like in a restaurant, and that they can operate their own TV remote controls.

Q How else can center personnel guide parents whose children need hospitalization?

A Tell them, "Be open to whatever your child wants to tell you, and follow that lead. Figure out a way to address the concerns. Try to find out what the exact question is and just answer that."

Some parents go too far. The child might ask, for example, "What's going to happen to me?" The parent may go into what will happen this week, next week and beyond, when all the time the child may have meant, "What's going to happen to me this morning?"

Ask, "Do you mean in the next hour or two?" or whatever question narrows it down. Don't overload a child with too much information.

The center could also advise, "Make sure your child knows you'll answer every question."

Preschoolers love when you write their words down. A parent who doesn't have an immediate answer can say, "That's an interesting question. I'll try to get the answer for you."

Ordering Information:

"**Your Child in the Hospital: A Practical Guide for Parents**" may be ordered from:

O'Reilly & Associates
101 Morris Street
Sebastopol, CA 95472-9902
(800) 998-9938
patientguides@oreilly.com
www.patientcenters.com

The book, one of a series of "Patient-Centered Guides" published by the company, is also available in bookstores.

Other books by Nancy Keene in the series are "Working With Your Doctor: Getting the Healthcare You Deserve" and "Childhood Leukemia: A Guide for Families, Friends & Caregivers."

Here are excerpts from

"Your Child in the Hospital: A Practical Guide for Parents"

Second Opinion

Try to find an independent physician to provide one; doctors who share a practice or regularly give referrals to each other may be leery of disagreeing with their colleagues.

Choosing Staff

The medical team includes many specialists, doctors, nurses, physical therapists, nutritionists, x-ray technicians, and more. At training hospitals, many of these people will be in the early stages of their careers. If a procedure is not going well, you can tell the person to stop and ask for a more skilled person to do the job.

Helping With an IV

Keep your child calm. The body reacts to fear by constricting the blood vessels near the skin surface. The calmer the child is, the larger his veins will be.

Controlling Pain

Ask the hospital's child life specialist, psychologist, or trained nurse to discuss and practice different methods of pain management with your child.

Insurance Forms

If you expect many hospitalizations, get a copy of every form you might need, such as claim forms for inpatient care, outpatient care, or prescriptions.

You can cut down on paperwork by filling in all the subscriber information on one of each type of form (except date and signature) and then making many copies. You will have a form ready to send in with each bill.

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Staff Teams in Child Care: Harkness House for Children

This is the third in a series of periodic JCCA articles exploring how different centers interpret and execute the team concept. For this article, we spoke with Debra Gaetano.

Introduction

Debra Gaetano is executive director of Harkness House for Children in Winnetka, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago.

The center is licensed for 67 children, from six weeks to six years.

Q Have teams affected morale and turnover?

A When I began working at this center, staff morale was at a low point, with turnover being the highest it had ever been.

"I immediately took on as my task forming a team with strong ties. It has been a main focus."

I immediately took on as my task forming a team with strong ties. It has been a main focus.

I'm very proud that surveys to staff and parents show that morale is very high. I'm also proud that we haven't had the turnover that has traditionally been found in early childhood programs.

Q What was your first act as director?

A The first thing I did was to tell the board not to expect much, administratively or paper-wise, in the first month. I spent that month in the classrooms.

No matter how long you were a teacher, you need to learn the culture of your new center.

Q What did you do to facilitate teams?

A One of my first tasks was to hire more staff.

One reason was that I wanted teachers to be able to hold meetings that they all could attend — all the infant teachers could go out of their room at the same time, for example. That way, we all got to know each other.

There are four floating teachers on the staff, so the regular teachers have time to go to meetings, to do planning, to prepare and have parent conferences, to attend outside conferences, and so on.

The floating teachers are also used in the interim when a teacher resigns. A floater can take the open position or go back to floating status after a replacement. Also, it's very hard to get subs, so they do that. They are full-time employees.

Q How did you motivate staff to want teams?

A I didn't have much motivating to do, because the staff was so hungry for teams.

I met with them and asked them to tell me what they did and didn't like about the program before that point.

I asked staff, teachers and board members what their concerns were.

Q What constitutes a team in your center?

A To my thinking, there are three basic teams, but they're all intermingled.

- The **whole center** makes one team. It includes staff, parents and children.
- There is the **administration** team — the director, assistant director and the lead teachers. We meet at least once a week.
- Each **classroom** is a team. The infant classroom has three teachers, for example, and the toddler room has four.

Q How do you see the director's role in a team situation?

A My idea of being an administrator is to go from left to right, not top-down.

I have both an open-book policy — meaning that I don't keep secrets from my staff — and an open-door policy.

They know I'm busy when my door is closed, because it's almost never closed.

Q What is the essence of creating a staff team?

A I believe that it is crucial to the strength of an early childhood program to create a strong staff team through enriching three relationships: staff/administration relations, staff/parent relations and staff/staff relations.

Q Would you talk about developing each of those relationships?

A Here are ways I recommend:

Staff/Administration Relations

It's very important for the director to take the time to really know the staff.

I also try to do little nice things for them. For example, during the cold weather I put a packet of hot chocolate with a Hershey's Kiss attached to it into each mailbox. It's very inexpensive to do something like that. It doesn't harm the budget.

"I believe that it is crucial to the strength of an early childhood program to create a strong staff team through enriching three relationships: staff/administration relations, staff/parent relations and staff/staff relations."

I made up this idea: On the wall of each classroom is a board with fifteen squares. In each square is a goal to accomplish. When it's done, I or the assistant director will put a star in that square. When all the squares are filled, the teachers get a little gift.

For example, a new staff member might be asked to learn the names of all the teachers or of five parents. Someone more experienced may be challenged to present at a conference or to try five new science projects that month. Other ideas are tasks like labeling books or making sure your room is neat every morning.

The assistant director and I do this while we're walking around in the halls and spending time in the classrooms. There's no time frame for completion. It becomes a little competition — trying to fill the card first.

The teachers are so self-motivated that the gifts are incidental; just tokens. They might get a $2 photo frame, lotion or a $5 or $10 certificate for classroom supplies.

Out of the eight or nine hours I work each day, I spend a minimum of three hours in classrooms. Like all directors, I have a tremendously busy schedule. But I believe that it's crucial to be present.

My advice to other directors is, "**Just find a way to do it**." For example, instead of being a slave to phone calls, make use of voice mail. Return calls when the children are sleeping. Shut the door then and do your work. When they're awake, be with them and the teachers.

Staff/Parent Relations

I think this relationship is hugely important.

Our parents have to **sign an agreement** dedicating them to give a certain amount of time to the center. This is to build their commitment not only to the center, but to their children's future education.

What they do can be as simple as coming in to rub backs at naptime or going for a walk with the children.

Some parents are too busy to put in time here, so there are **tasks they can do at home**, like repairing books or puzzles.

We have a system that facilitates daily communication between staff and parents. Each child has a spiral notebook that we call a **journal**.

The teachers write something every day about each child. The journals are placed in the parents' mailboxes, and the parents write back each day.

We also do "**courtesy calls**." If a child is being potty-trained and is successful, for example, the parent is called right away.

And we have **monthly newsletters**. We encourage parents to mention special things that teachers do.

Staff/Staff Relations

The biggest thing is to allow the staff to be together away from the children, so they can develop relationships.

One way we do that is by having **weekly meetings**. They're usually in one- or two-hour blocks. Sometimes we combine lunch and a meeting.

We also have a **breakfast club**. People take turns bringing in food on Friday mornings.

Our center is closed for two weeks in May, when the building is used for a rummage sale. The first week is vacation time.

We use the second week for training. We get together for six or seven hours each day, somewhere other than in the center.

We get to know each other. We have different activities. We sometimes have guest speakers and seminars on various subjects, like developmentally appropriate art activities, relaxation training for teachers, infant massage, Reggio Emilia or CPR certification. We also observe other early childhood programs.

Q What else strengthens staff teams?

A The director has to be an advocate.

I think my staff is very happy with the new benefits I helped to get them. They're entitled to:

"My job is so much easier because I have a team."

- **Reimbursement**

This is for tuition and professional development.

Staff members are reimbursed for early childhood courses, but also for doing whatever increases their knowledge and skill related to their jobs. Examples are attending professional seminars or buying early childhood books.

- **Fee Reduction**

Teachers get reduced rates when their children attend the center. The percentage they save is greater the longer they're on the staff.

Q Can most centers afford such benefits?

A When I mentioned these benefits to the board, they said there was no money for them.

I said I could cut expenses so that we could afford it. I analyzed every aspect of operation to see where costs could be cut; ordering from different companies, for example.

I asked the staff to help. I said, "Let's find creative ways to make some things instead of buying them."

I also did surveys to show the board how benefits help staff retention.

Not all staff members make use of the benefits, but it makes a big difference that they have that option.

Q How long did it take for the team concept to significantly improve your center?

A Change for the better was instant, according to the teachers. Parents said they noticed a difference in about three months.

But it took about a year to get it to where I wanted it to be.

Q Is it easy for new people to join your team?

A The strong team is sometimes daunting to new staff members. They wonder how they fit in, because there is so much bonding; the staff is so close.

I assign each new person a **mentor** from another classroom. The mentor is not for training. That's done by someone else. The mentor takes the person around, shows him or her the neighborhood, the stores, and so on, and answers questions. The mentor becomes the new member's buddy.

Of course, I hope that new people won't hesitate to come to me or the co-teachers in their rooms. But this is one more avenue — someone else who can help.

You lose people when they're upset but have no one to go to.

Q What would you tell a director who is unsure about staff teams?

A My job is so much easier because I have a team. Maybe it's laziness or selfishness. Teachers volunteer to do all kinds of things.

I'd tell the director to observe a program with a really strong team.

I don't think a center works well for long without teams. There's too much turnover.

Q What would you like to add?

A Developing a team takes time, patience, dedication and a listening ear, but it brings tremendous rewards.

For more information, contact:

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Winnetka, IL 60093
(847) 501-2549 *See Harkness House Survey, page 14*

Harkness House Survey

Each year, Harkness House for Children asks parents to answer the questions below. The ratings are: **1** (not at all), **2** (below average), **3** (average), **4** (above average), **5** (excellent).

Questions About Your Child's Classroom

- ☐ My child is being enriched in his/her classroom.
- ☐ The program helps my child grow cognitively.
- ☐ The program helps my child grow socially.
- ☐ The program helps my child grow emotionally.
- ☐ The program helps my child advance his/her physical skills.
- ☐ My child is learning about diversity.
- ☐ My child is learning self-help skills.
- ☐ My child is learning to solve issues with his/her friends.
- ☐ The classroom teachers communicate well with the parents.

I feel the strength of the room is_____

I think the room can be improved by_____

Questions About the Overall Center

- ☐ Center management communicates well with parents.
- ☐ Center management is efficient with bills and receipts.
- ☐ The overall center has a warm, friendly feeling.
- ☐ I am greeted in the morning and evening by a member of management or a staff member.
- ☐ When my child is sick, I am called in a timely fashion.
- ☐ I am given the opportunity to have conferences with my child's teacher.

Overall, I would give the center a rating of_____

I feel that the strengths of the center are_____

I feel that the center can be improved in these ways: _____

Problems With Parents: Join This Ongoing Dialogue

*Handling difficult situations with parents is the subject of an ongoing **JCCA** series.*

As most human relations problems don't have single, definitive solutions that work in all cases, we ask readers to add their voices to this dialogue.

*Please share with your colleagues solutions that have worked for you. And if you have specific problems with parents that you'd like **JCCA** and other professionals to address, please bring them to our attention.*

Late Tuition Payments

One of the most uncomfortable and stressful situations for a director is when a parent is behind on tuition, especially when the person continually pays late.

Marilyn Llanos, director, told us how her center, **First Step Nursery School and Child Development Center** in Woodland Hills, California, which is licensed for 78 children, ages two to six, deals with the problem.

"We charge $10 for each five days the payment is late. There is a grace period of five days; then the $10 is charged. If five more days go by, they're charged another $10."

Is there a limit to how high the fees will go? "When it gets to be over $200, we start to get nervous," but the center has at times charged that much, she adds.

Tuition is paid for four weeks at a time, in advance.

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What if a parent says there are money problems and asks the center to be patient?

"We're a small business, so we can decide on a case-by-case basis. We can be more accommodating than a large institution.

"On occasion, we waive the fee. We wouldn't charge someone who was late just once, or a person who has just had a baby, for example.

"The fee is designed for the chronically late person."

Book by First Step President

Bette Simons, First Step's president, has written a book, "**Tips for Preschool Teachers: First Aid for Bad Times with Directors, Parents, and Difficult Children**." In it, she tells prospective directors:

> *Teachers cannot get paid and bills cannot be met, if tuition payments seem optional for people using child care services.*
>
> *It helps to remember that banks that hold mortgages do not wait for payments, they level fines. Landlords, department stores, utility companies and credit card companies all expect payments and have monetary consequences if bills are not paid.*
>
> *People using child care should have a clearly written policy about payments and refunds given them when entering a preschool.*
>
> *It's the director's job to see that the plan gets carried out. Sometimes she may give scholarships or discounts, but it's bad news to be careless or timid about collecting the income.*

Center-Wide Policies

Many problems with parents can be avoided or mitigated by establishing good, consistent policies for teachers to follow.

In the book, for example, Bette Simons notes how setting up a "Lost and Found" gives a teacher an alternative to helplessly apologizing to an angry or upset parent.

The parent can not only be directed to a specific place to look for what was lost, but can usually borrow necessary items, like a jacket for the child to wear home to replace the missing one.

Separation Issues

"I consider our separation plan our most important center-wide policy," Marilyn Llanos says.

Why? "Parents need assurances. It's a trust issue. Their trust level directly affects their child's adjustment."

What is First Step's separation policy?

- "We ask parents to visit the center with their child; to 'hang out' before enrollment."

How often should parents visit?

"The number of times they come depends on the child's temperament and the parents' willingness to separate."

- "I recommend that the teacher make a brief visit to the child's home."

When does the teacher go to the home?

"I think it's best to visit early in the relationship. It could be the week prior to enrollment, the week of enrollment or the first or second week of attendance."

What is the purpose of the visit?

"It makes the child feel very special, and it gives the child and the teacher something to talk about, like the child's pets or nice bedroom."

- "If the child has difficulty adjusting despite these measures, we use a cordless phone for the child to call his or her parents.

"Children find it hard to realize that their parents still exist when they leave the center. Another technique is giving the child a photo of the parent to look at during the day.

"How we deal with it depends largely on the age and temperament of the child."

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Problems With Parents: Joining the Dialogue

In a previous article in this series, we talked about several topics, one of which was the problem of parents picking up their children late.

We asked that readers share their ideas. Here are two responses.

Late Pickups

Marilyn Llanos, director of **First Step Nursery School and Child Development Center**, licensed for 78, in Woodland Hills, California, says:

"After closing time, which is 6 p.m., we charge one dollar per minute.

"**Our policy is strictly enforced, even if a parent calls beforehand**. We might make an exception if several parents are late because of an overturned trash truck, for example, but they'd still have to pay some portion of the fee.

"**We pay the fee directly to the teachers**. It's an incentive for them. It makes them feel that their time is valuable."

Debra Gaetano, director of **Harkness House for Children**, licensed for 67, in Winnetka, Illinois, says:

"We do everything that was described in the article."

In addition: "**We charge five dollars for every five minutes or portion thereof**. We give parents leeway from 6 to 6:05 p.m., but at 6:06 we charge ten dollars, penalizing back to 6 p.m. So 6 to 6:05 is free, 6:06 to 6:10 is ten dollars, 6:11 to 6:15 is fifteen dollars, and so on.

"**After six o'clock, all children who haven't been picked up are brought to the office**. One reason we do that is for insurance liability, but another is that the parents tend to feel more guilty when they have to go to the office. They can't sneak out.

"We don't entertain the children in the office — we don't give them books or toys. We want the parents to see that being late isn't fair to their children.

"We have a digital clock in the office, set to radio time, so there's no question about the actual time a parent arrives.

"We have a '**Late Pickup Form**' with the person's name, the time the child was picked up and the fee being applied.

"When we started the policy, about ten to fifteen children were picked up late each day. The center had a lateness policy, but it wasn't enforced.

"After I had been here for two weeks, I sent out a letter that we were going to begin enforcing the policy. At first the parents were furious, but then they began to understand.

"**Parents are required to pay cash that night**. If they don't have it, they have to bring it in the next day or their children won't be admitted.

"The assistant director is required to be with the children. Sometimes a teacher assists. The money is kept by the assistant director, or it is split if two people are on duty.

"We rotate the teachers who will stay on a volunteer basis. They love earning extra money.

"**At 6:30, we call the first emergency contact person listed for the child**. If the contacts can't be reached, according to our policy, we call the police department to inform them, but we haven't had to enforce that part.

"We're in a very affluent community. In some areas, you can't call the police, because the authorities may suspect neglect."

Do you agree with the ideas expressed here and in the previous article in this series? Do you disagree? Is there additional information you could add that would help other owners and directors?

Please join this ongoing dialogue, sharing your thoughts on these topics and other parent problems. To do so, contact Christine Kalbaugh, publisher.

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